



SUITED TO RESPOND

Firefighters striving to be sole-source emergency solution

STORY AND PHOTOS BY
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Jeff Young, an engineer, steadies himself on a railing while helping to carry firefighter Brian Miller, who pretended to have a broken leg, during the hazardous materials exercise. The crew was instructed to contain the simulated spill and get Miller out as fast as possible. Crew members are with the 22 Area Fire Station.



The crew consults blueprints of the building during the exercise. According to Bob Henderson, a retired hazardous materials specialist under contract to train the firefighters, finding the spill can be difficult. Below, crew members walk single-file and man two-way radios as they search the industrial facility.

OCEANSIDE — From recovering hazardous materials to waging swift-water rescues, the Camp Pendleton Fire Department is striving to offer not merely fire response, but a broad range of emergency services to cover any crisis.

The department's new name — Camp Pendleton Emergency Services — attests to ramped-up training aimed at preparing firefighters to handle anything on base and in surrounding communities.

"We want to be the first responder to a disaster in this area instead of sitting back and watching others do the work," said Scott Simpson, a fire inspector here.

Case in point — a drill April 10 involving a simulated sulfuric acid spill. An industrial center in Oceanside served as the backdrop for the scenario.

Four firefighters took part in the drill, orchestrated by Bob Henderson, a retired hazardous materials specialist under contract to train the firefighters.

He said the firefighters executed the drill with speed and efficiency.

"They did a great job and moved really fast. When they complete their training, if something were to happen, they would knock it out in no time," said Henderson, who managed hazardous materials response for the city of Los Angeles before retiring after 30 years of service.

The training is equipping the crew to deal with a broad range of hazardous materials — and even has implications for anti-terrorism response, Henderson said.

"Terrorism is nothing more



Brian Miller, a firefighter with the 22 Area Fire Station, arrives on scene to stop a simulated spill of sulfuric acid. Firefighters contained the spill, then were pitched a follow-on scenario to further test their skills. In the scenario, Miller, below, was called upon to portray a casualty with a broken leg. The rest of the crew on scene worked together to evacuate him from the danger zone.

than the (intentional) release of hazardous materials," he said.

To prepare firefighters for every contingency, the training is dynamic and fast-paced.

"They really keep trying to surprise us, but they haven't been able to do it yet," said Dave Griffith, a firefighter in the 22 Area.

The six-week course is part of an emergency services makeover that started in January and will end late this month. Then in August, Headquarters Marine Corps representatives will view another drill to witness the department's advances.

More firefighters will undergo the training in the near future, Simpson said.

The civilian crew works 24-hour shifts keeping Camp Pendleton safe.

"We're here to support the training on base, but we like to think of ourselves as just another city in the county — one that works together to keep everyone safe," said Tim Hoover, the base fire chief.

